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When the King Came

A Christmas Pastoral Sketch
for Young People.

Eight Leading Characters.

By Miss E. Stevens

Price 10 cents

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WHAT THE SHEPHERDS SAW

Scene I.

A humble home in Jerusalem. A peasant woman and a small girl sit making a garment.

Reuben.....A Shepherd Lad
Sarah .....His Mother
Tirzah .....His Sister

[*Enter Reuben in a state of suppressed excitement*].

Sarah. My son, what means this? Where hast thou left thy flock?

Reuben. Oh mother, my Uncle Dan tends the flock while I came hither to tell thee the news!

Sarah. News, Reuben? What news meanest thou?

Reuben. Mother! Messiah hath been born!

Sarah [*Reprovingly*]. Speak not thus wickedly, my son. Jehovah will punish thee.

Reuben. Listen, mother, and I will tell thee all

Sarah. Perchance thy sister had better leave us.

Tirzah. Oh brother, beseech our mother to let me also hear thy news! [*Weeps.*]

Reuben. Yea, little sister, weep not. Mother, thou wilt let her stay?

Sarah. I have no choice since thou dost ask it, Reuben.

Reuben. Then listen both of ye. 'Twas but two nights gone, and I with the other shepherds and their helpers was lying out on the hillside yonder. We were all watching our flocks, for, as thou knowest, thy brother Dan hath lost four of his lambs in as many nights, and we were hoping to catch the thief. We began to talk and protest against this scheme

of Caesar's that all the world should be taxed yet more to add to Rome's already over-running coffers. My Uncle Dan had begun to unfold to some of us a plan whereby we might evade this wicked taxation of our little flocks, when suddenly all about us shone a great light, and we heard voices out of the sky.

TIRZAH. Oh Reuben, wert thou not frightened almost to death? Voices!

SARAH. My son, hast thou been drinking more of Dan's summer wine, which I forbade thee to touch again?

REUBEN. Nay, mother, I had drunk nothing.

TIRZAH. Perchance thou didst dream this light and these voices.

REUBEN. Hold thy peace, child, and listen to thine elder brother. We all saw the light, as it were a ladder extending earthward from the stars.

SARAH. Such a ladder as our father Jacob saw at Bethel?

REUBEN. Yea, mother, such a ladder of light. And we heard voices singing, but, oh, the sweetness of the music! Never have I heard the like, no, not even in the synagogue. And as we grew more accustomed to it, we could make out the words of the song. We saw bright forms with wings, crowned with light and radiance. Oh, mother! . . . . . .

SARAH. What were the words they sang?

REUBEN. One part of the Heavenly Choir would begin the strain and the others would take up their parts, and the words were "Glory to God in the Highest, On Earth Peace, Good Will Toward Men."

SARAH. What didst thou and the rest do, my son?

REUBEN. We were all stricken with great fear, but one of the bright beings, who looked as the Rabbi says Gabriel looks, descended lower and lower from the sky until he

seemed to be but a little way from where we lay on the hillside; and he said unto us, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

TIRZAH. The City of David? That is Bethlehem.

SARAH. What more didst thou hear, Reuben?

REUBEN. The bright one also said, "This shall be a sign unto you, ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And then once again the great chorus burst out, beginning "Glory to God in the Highest," and the words grew fainter as the bright spirits went up the radiant ladder and disappeared from our view. Then all was quiet save for the noises of the flock.

TIRZAH. Oh, that I had also been there, Reuben! I would have learned that angel song, and might have sung it to thee when thou art weary.

REUBEN. Nay, little one, thou hast a voice sweet as the nightingale's, but thou couldst not sing such strains as the angels sang. No earthly voice could give forth such a melody!

SARAH. Distress not thy little sister thus, but tell us what happened after the angels had gone up from thee.

REUBEN. We divided our number, and half went straightway into Bethlehem to see this thing, and the others remained with the flocks until their return. I, being one of the younger ones, had to wait until my elders had been and returned; in truth, I am but just now come from Bethlehem and must hasten back to the flock, but I would not that ye should be ignorant of this great and wonderful thing.

TIRZAH. What didst thou find at Bethlehem?

SARAH. Yea, thou hast left out that part of thy story.

REUBEN. I went and found the Inn of the Stranger filled with the people who had come at Cæsar's command to pay their taxes, and I enquired of Eliab, the inn-keeper, whether a child had been born last night. He shook his head saying that no births had taken place at the inn, and then I remembered that the angel said "In a manger," so I made my way to the stall, and there I saw a woman, scarce more than a maid, with blue eyes and ruddy complexion like the elders say King David's were, and in her arms lay the form of a lately born child. We came in softly, and as I looked at the Babe's tiny face cuddled close in the crook of his mother's arm, something, I knew not what, made me remove my sandals and sink on to my knees amid the straw, and when I looked around all the other shepherds had done likewise.

SARAH. Was the Child's father there in the stall, too?

REUBEN. Nay, that I know not. Although while we tarried, there came in a man of mature years, whom some said was Joseph of Nazareth, a carpenter, but he looked at the Babe with reverent and adoring eyes even as did all of us.

SARAH. Strange are the ways of the Lord! Reuben, return thou now to thy flock and leave me to ponder over what thou hast told me, and we will talk of this matter again.

REUBEN. Then farewell for a little space. And be thou a good child, Tirzah, and I will bring thee one of my new lambs for a playmate.

[*Exit Reuben.*]

TIRZAH. Oh, mother, can we not go to Bethlehem and see this wonderful Child whom Reuben saith is the Messiah?

SARAH. I have a kinsman at Bethlehem, perchance he may also know of this wonder.

CURTAIN

THE MEETING OF THE MAGI

Scene II.

Room at the Inn in Jerusalem.

[*Pharos, an Egyptian Sage, walks up and down looking from time to time at a scroll he holds in his hands. He wears a gold star on his breast.*]

The Magi
Govind (The Wise)...A Hindu Prince and Sage
Pharos (The Light).....An Egyptian Priest
Artemus (Truth Seeker)...A Greek Soothsayer

Pharos. [*Solil.*] Strange, passing strange! Thus far have I been guided by the Star, even as the mystic writings told, but I have come alone. Where are they who should have met me, the sages from other lands? Have I misjudged the time? [*Looks carefully at the scroll.*] Ha! who comes hither?

[*Enter Govind the Wise from India; wears gold star on breast.*]

[*Both salaam deeply.*]

Govind. Hail, stranger prince! Am I in the presence of another follower of the Star?

Pharos. A follower indeed. I am Pharos, the Light of Egypt. From the Land of ancient Khem have I travelled across the great desert. My attendants fainted and fell by the way, and their bones lie bleaching on the sands, but I pressed onward alone, and even now my last camel lyeth without the city gate dying. But from whence art thou?

GOVIND. From the ancient land of Hind am I come, where I am known as Govind the Wise. A searcher after Truth have I ever been, and when among our sacred writings I found the prophecy that out of this Land of Israel there should arise One who should reign and whose Kingdom should have no end, I left my native land, and have come to pay Him homage and to lay my offering at His feet.

PHAROS. Strange, indeed, are the ways of the gods, that *I* should come hither to do homage to a King risen among the people whose fathers were once slaves in my land, and whom my fathers forced to make bricks to build our palaces and temples. But my time is short, and there is yet one other Follower of the Star for whom we must wait.

GOVIND. Methinks he must soon arrive, for he appeared with a vast retinue at the city gates just after my own slaves had entered. His horses were a sight to behold, and he also wore the star on his breast, though from whence he comes I know not. Ha! this is he!

[*Enter Artemus, a Greek, wearing star on breast.*] *All salute.*

ARTEMUS. So, brothers, it hath happened even as the heavens foretold, for you, too, surely, are seekers after Him whose sign is a Star, even as I.

PHAROS. Yea, good sir, I represent the mother of all learning and mystery, for from ancient Egypt am I come to worship this new King of the Jews.

GOVIND. And I from a land scarce less ancient, for India is my land, where the ancient gods have held sway since time began and Brahma made the world. But methinks thou art from yet another land.

ARTEMUS. Thou speakest truly, good Hindu, for from the far-famed Isle of Greece do I hail, where the blue waters

of the salt sea wash upon our ever green shores, and where the songs of the sea nymphs may still be heard by those whose ears are attuned to their melodies. I was led hither by the light of a wondrous Star that blazed in the eastern sky and whose beams seemed to bid me follow wheresoever it led. I, too, would seek this new-born King and lay my offering of *gold* at His infant feet.

GOVIND. I have brought with me *frankincense,* for our mystical writings say that this King shall not be as other kings. He shall be invested with Deity; therefore, did I include frankincense with my gift, and will do Him homage as a god.

PHAROS. My offering will contain *myrrh.*

GOVIND. Myrrh? Then thou deemest this King of the Jews to be Lord also of the Dead, seeing thou bringest spices for the dead. Or, perchance, thou hast forgotten that thou comest to a birth and not to a funeral!

PHAROS. Nay, good Hindu; mock me not. For truly the horoscope of this new King doth say that He hath all power over Death and the After-World. The heavens have told me strange tales of Him, for He shall not reign as do other kings, but He must suffer many things at the hand of His people. He must be put to death, but even thus He shall not remain with the dead, for the planets show that he shall rise again and live forever.

GOVIND. He must then indeed be from God as well as a King to whom we have come to pay homage. That He shall be exceedingly wonderful our sacred books show, but nothing of what thou hast said, O Egyptian.

ARTEMUS. Among the gods of my people are many wonders, but none like unto what thou dost tell. Thy ancient books indeed contain many marvels.

PHAROS. Nay, brother sages, I found not all I have told ye in our books. But I am an old man, and when one draws nigh to the grave one's eyes and ears become sharpened to the unseen things even as they become dulled to earthly things. Not from our books have I discovered all this, but from the signs of the heavens and many years of seeking among the planets. Together with this, there have been visions given to me, but of them I may not speak even unto you, except to say that as I abode in the shrine of Osiris to worship the sun as he sank into the Nile, it became suddenly dark in the shrine and I heard a great and terrible voice which called unto me and said, "Oh, Pharos, thou who art called the Light of Egypt; with all thy searching thou canst not find God. Cease, then, to pray to the sun and cease from adoring the fire, and from henceforth worship only Him who made both sun and fire. Not in these great temples shalt thou find Him, but follow thou yon Star and it shall lead thee to Him who is the Maker of all things visible and invisible." And so I followed the Star, and I would bid ye both to pray to your gods if mayhap they will endow you also with eyes to pierce the gloom beyond.

GOVIND. Thus far hath the Star led us all. Where think you we should now look for this King?

ARTEMUS. Methinks he should be known at the court of Herod, and I would that all proceed thither and enquire of *him* concerning this matter.

GOVIND. The way is good. What sayest thou, venerable Egyptian?

PHAROS. Aye, to Herod's court if ye are so minded, but methinks we shall not find Him *there* whom we seek.

GOVIND. Where then, O Reader of the Stars?

PHAROS. Nay, that I can not tell, but perchance we may yet learn something at Herod's palace; and surely the Star will again guide us at night.

ARTEMUS. To Herod's court, then. Lead on, noble Pharos.

[*Exit all.*]

CURTAIN

HEROD'S DECREE

Scene III.

A Garden of Herod's Palace.

Lemuel.....A Hebrew Money Lender
Marcus.....One of his Patrons

[*Lemuel pacing slowly up and down the walk. Marcus comes swiftly toward him.*]

Lemuel. Peace be with thee, noble Marcus.

Marcus. Hush thee! Speak softly.

Lemuel. Wherefore this secrecy? [*Marcus pulls him aside.*]

Marcus. I have come to warn thee, Lemuel. Thou hast in thy house a small child.

Lemuel. Yea, my little Samuel of nine months old. The sweetest and dearest . . . . . .

Marcus. Spare me, Lemuel; I know what thou wouldst say. But listen thou, I have just left Herod, and have heard him give an order that may affect thee and thy infant Samuel.

Lemuel. How sayest thou?

Marcus. Herod hath but just issued an edict that all male babes shall be put to the sword that are of age two years and under.

Lemuel. Unnatural monster! Hath the king gone altogether mad?

Marcus. Nay, good Lemuel, there is great method in his madness. It hath been brought to his knowledge by certain

great sages from the East that there hath been born a new King of the Jews, and Herod, fearing for his throne, hath ordered all man children under two years old to be butchered, so that this King shall be destroyed amongst them. Seeing that I am a friend of this same Herod, although at times his excesses sicken me, I was not ordered out while the captain received his orders signed and sealed with the king's seal. I saw thee walking in the garden, and remembering thy kindness to me when I needed money, which is always, I made haste to warn thee, so that thou and thy infant son might yet have time to escape this slaughter of little ones.

LEMUEL. [*Casting up his eyes.*] Oh, God of Abraham! how long must we suffer thus?

MARCUS. [*Impatiently.*] Cease thy prayers, and get thee to thy house and make thee ready to leave the country.

LEMUEL. But whither shall we flee, good Marcus? All my goods are here.

MARCUS. A truce to thy goods! Wouldst rather preserve thy goods or thy offspring?

LEMUEL. Oh, my little Samuel! I will fly at once!

MARCUS. Well, be thou warned to fly to a country beyond Rome's dominion. Fare thee well.

LEMUEL. May the God of Jacob reward thee, heathen though thou art. I will cancel half thy debt to me when this affair hath blown over.

MARCUS. I thank thee, son of Abraham, for thy kind intentions, but methinks thou wilt do well to hasten, for the soldiers will lose no time to carry Herod's order, which will be much to their taste, seeing they love not thy race over much. Adieu!

CURTAIN

THE FIRST BELIEVERS

Scene IV.

The Shepherd's Home at Jerusalem.

[*Sarah and Tirzah sit talking with Reuben.*]

Reuben. So, thou hast returned from Bethlehem and hast seen the Child, mother?

Sarah. Aye, we found the manger at the Inn, whither Mary of Nazareth had gone and where the child was born. Truly wondrous are the ways of the Lord with His chosen people.

Reuben. Dost believe that this is indeed the Messiah for whose coming our race hath waited so long?

Sarah. How can I doubt it, my son? Have I not searched the Scriptures, and found that all the things the prophets spake concerning Messiah have been fulfilled in yonder Babe at Bethlehem?

Reuben. Hast heard how His life is now threatened by Herod? Certain great Sages sought out Herod to know where the new King should be born, and Herod hath been consumed with fear, since they have not returned to tell him further of this thing as he commanded them. Seeing that he hath been mocked of these Wise Men who have returned to their own land by some other way, Herod hath conceived a plan to put all male children to the sword from two years old and under, thinking thus to bring about the death of this new King, and even now the wailing of these bereaved mothers is in our ears night and day, until my soul is sick with compassion.

SARAH. Aye, the cruel monster, king though he be! Yet shall all his plots come to nought, for yonder Babe, being truly the Messiah, shall be preserved from harm, for who can hurt the Lord's Anointed?

TIRZAH. Thinkest thou the soldiers who attempted to kill Him would fall mysteriously slain by the Babe's mighty power?

REUBEN. How shall we say, little sister; but one thing I know from Amos who tends the flock with me, and who hath a cousin at Bethlehem. He hath sent Amos word that the manger at the Inn is no longer inhabited by the Child and His mother, but they have gone, none know whither. They had departed even before the edict had been signed by Herod, but where they have departed is a mystery. But be sure of this, that no power of Rome or any other can harm this Child, for did I not hear the angels proclaim that this is indeed the Saviour of the World and our promised Messiah, who shall save His people from their sins.

CURTAIN

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